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**The relationship between brand love and actual brand performance: evidence from an international study**

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The relationship between brand love and actual brand performance:  
evidence from an international study

ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** The purpose of this paper is to examine the different relationship that brand love, compared to brand attitude, has with actual brand performance in a cross-national and cross-category context.

**Design/methodology/approach:** An empirical study is conducted in the US, Russia and Indonesia to develop and validate a short but comprehensive measure of brand love. A brand attitude measure derived from company’s tracking studies and behavioural measures derived from panel data are used to examine the different relationship of brand love and brand attitude with brand performance.

**Findings:** The findings show that consumers in the US, Russia and Indonesia share a similar concept of brand love. They also show that brand love, compared to brand attitude, is more strongly related with growth in behavioural loyalty, whereas brand attitude, compared to brand love, is more strongly related to the brand size in the present.

**Research limitations/implications:** The paper combines psychological and behavioural data from different sources. Future research may collect both types of data from the same sample of consumers. Besides, the paper uses brand love and brand attitude data related to loyal consumers and users, respectively. Future research may consider both types of consumers simultaneously.

**Practical implications:** The paper clarifies why brand love measures should be integrated in a company’s brand measurement system, and their specific contribution compared to brand attitude.

**Originality/value:** This paper is the first that examines brand love in a cross-national and cross-category context and that shows the relationship of brand love versus brand attitude with actual brand performance using company/industry-derived data.

**Keywords:** Brand love, brand attitude, actual brand performance, cross-national research, scale development, consumer behaviour

**Paper type:** Research paper

## The relationship between brand love and actual brand performance: evidence from an international study

### 1. Introduction

Recent contributions in the marketing and branding literature have paid great attention to the strongest, most positive relationships that consumers may develop with a brand. Constructs such as brand attachment (Park *et al.*, 2010; Thomson *et al.*, 2005), consumer devotion (Pimentel and Reynolds, 2004), brand passion (Albert *et al.*, 2013; Swimberghe *et al.*, 2014), brand romance (Patwardhan and Balasubramanian, 2011) and, in particular, brand love (Ahuvia, 2005; Albert *et al.*, 2009; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Rossiter, 2012) seem to be increasingly important to better understand successful relationships between brands and consumers. Scholars, in fact, have highlighted the various positive consequences that brand love can have from both consumer and company viewpoints. If, on one side, loved brands contribute to developing the consumer's self (Ahuvia, 2005; Fournier, 1998), on the other side, consumers who love a brand are the most loyal, committed advocates of the brand (e.g., Albert and Merunka, 2013).

However, the usefulness of the construct and measures of brand love has been questioned by some scholars (e.g., Romaniuk, 2013), especially because of the lack of evidence of the relationship between brand love and behavioural, rather than intentional, measures. Thus, this paper aims to demonstrate the importance of the measurement of brand love by addressing the following questions: "What does brand love tell us in terms of actual brand performance?" and "Does brand love say something more, or different, from other well-established brand-related constructs such as, for example, brand attitude—which represents one of the core pillars in companies' brand measurements systems (Keller, 1998)?"

To that aim, this paper builds a multi-study research project with one of the leading multinational fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) companies in three countries (i.e., US, Russia and Indonesia), using representative samples of adult consumers of the national populations and

various brands from different FMCG product categories<sup>1</sup>. Specifically, it combines data from different sources. Data on brand love are collected using an *ad hoc* measurement scale developed in the current paper, whereas data on brand attitude are derived from company’s tracking studies and brand performance measure are taken from panel data.

In doing so, the current paper goes beyond the existing literature in three ways. First and foremost, the paper examines the relationships between brand love and brand performance measures that reflect actual, rather than intentional, behaviours. Second, the paper compares the relationships that brand love and brand attitude have with actual brand performance, in order to understand the differences between these two constructs and their relationship with actual brand performance. Third, the paper develops a short but comprehensive measure of brand love that can be effectively applied by researchers studying brand love in relation to other concepts (e.g., actual brand performance measures); a measure of brand love that can be used across different countries and product categories<sup>2</sup>.

The paper proceeds as follows. In the next sections, it reviews the concepts of brand love and brand attitude. It then elaborates two hypotheses stating the different relationships of brand love and brand attitude with actual brand performance. To test these hypotheses, a new measure of brand love is developed and validated cross-nationally; it is then used, together with brand attitude, to test the relationships of these constructs with key brand performance measures. Implications are finally discussed on both academic and managerial levels.

2. Conceptual background

<sup>1</sup> The sample of FMCG brands being investigated in the current paper includes both rational/functional and emotional/experiential brands; however, the specific brand names cannot be disclosed, as required by the company supporting the research project.

<sup>2</sup> The brand love measure reported in this paper is developed by the authors independently from the FMCG company collaborating with the project. Such measure does not represent a performance metric used by the company.

## 2.1. Brand love

Definition and measurement. The concept of brand love emerges in the marketing literature thanks to the pioneer work of Shimp and Madden (1988). In this contribution, the two scholars strongly rely on theories from psychology. In particular, they adapt the interpersonal theory of love (Sternberg, 1986) to the marketing and branding context, and propose that brand love comprises the dimensions of passion, intimacy and commitment (Shimp and Madden, 1988).

Subsequent contributions further develop the concept of brand love, with a closer focus on the marketing and branding context. Ahuvia (2005) initiates the empirical research on the concept: by adopting an interpretive approach, the author shows that consumers can develop an intense emotional relationship with a variety of consumption objects, including brands. Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) follow by proposing a view of brand love as a unidimensional construct that can be measured through a ten-item scale.

A more complex interpretation of the phenomenon is provided by Albert *et al.* (2009), for whom brand love represents a multi-dimensional concept. Through their research conducted on French consumers, they show that brand love consists of two macro-dimensions, “affection” and “passion”, which, in turn, include several dimensions. “Affection” for the brand is expressed as: uniqueness, according to which the consumer views the brand unique and/or special; intimacy, that is, the consumer feels close to the brand; duration, which reflects the long-term relationship between the consumer and the brand; memories, based on which the consumer associates the brand to his/her past life; and dream, which regards the presence of the brand in the consumers’ mind. “Passion” for the brand is expressed as: pleasure, which indicates the pleasure given by the brand to the consumer; and idealization, which reflects the magical nature of the relationship between the consumer and the brand.

A multi-dimensional view of the concept is also proposed by Batra *et al.* (2012), who use the notion of “prototype” to define brand love. For them, the notion of “prototype” best describes complex phenomena, such as love, that are difficult to capture using rigorous and precise

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2  
3 definitions. The brand love prototype includes seven core components, that is, self-brand  
4 integration, passion-driven behaviours, positive emotional connection, long-term relationship,  
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6 positive overall attitude valence, attitude certainty and confidence (strength) and anticipated  
7  
8 separation distress. In terms of measurement, the brand love scale advanced by Batra *et al.* (2012)  
9  
10 on the basis of several studies on US consumers includes 84 items grouped in sixteen first-order  
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12 dimensions, some of which are also grouped in second-order dimensions.  
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16 A different interpretation of brand love is offered by Rossiter (2012), who stresses the need  
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18 for defining brand love in a way that allows researchers to distinguish it from love toward a person.  
19  
20 He defines brand love by the simultaneous presence of consumer’s deep affection for the branded  
21  
22 product and anticipated separation anxiety if the product were not available. Using samples of  
23  
24 German respondents, he develops a single-item measure of brand love which assesses brand love as  
25  
26 opposed to other feelings toward the brand, that is, liking, neutral feeling, disliking and hating.  
27  
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29 Outcomes of brand love. The majority of papers in the literature establishes a positive relationship  
30  
31 between brand love and psychological variables connected to brand performance. These include,  
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33 among others, active engagement (Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen, 2010; Sarkar, 2014; Sarkar and  
34  
35 Sreejesh, 2014), brand commitment (Albert and Merunka, 2013), brand loyalty (Batra et al., 2012;  
36  
37 Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen, 2010; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006), word-of-mouth (Albert and Merunka,  
38  
39 2013; Batra et al., 2012; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006), impulse buying (Sarkar, 2014), purchase  
40  
41 intention (Pawle and Cooper, 2006; Sarkar and Sreejesh, 2014), willingness to pay a price premium  
42  
43 (Albert and Merunka, 2013; Bauer *et al.*, 2009), resistance to negative information about the brand  
44  
45 (Batra *et al.*, 2012) or negative behaviours adopted by the brand (Bauer *et al.*, 2009). These  
46  
47 variables are typically captured through consumer claimed metrics which refer to both the past (e.g.  
48  
49 past word-of-mouth) and the future (e.g., future intentions).  
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53  
54 In addition to psychological variables, some scholars consider brand love in relation to  
55  
56 volume-based sales metrics. Specifically, Rossiter and Bellman (2012) examine the relationship  
57  
58 between brand love and personal purchases of the brand or “share of requirements”. The measure of  
59  
60

share of requirements that they use, however, is still claimed, thus does not refer to actual brand performance.

## 2.2. Brand attitude

Consumers' attitudes toward the brand, or more simply brand attitudes, represent a well-established concept in marketing and branding which has been widely investigated over the years. Brand attitudes are defined as "relative enduring, unidimensional summary evaluation of the brand that presumably energizes behaviour" (Spears and Singh, 2004, p. 55). They are considered as the foundations of brand image, a key dimension of brand knowledge (Keller, 2003) and a type of brand associations (Keller, 1993). They can concern beliefs about product-related attributes, such as specific product features, or non-product-related attributes, such as price, packaging, user imagery and usage imagery (Keller, 1993). Brand attitudes have been widely investigated in the marketing and branding literature with respect to both their antecedents and outcomes. The latter includes, among others, purchase intention (e.g., Spears and Singh, 2004) and brand equity (e.g., Faircloth *et al.*, 2001).

Brand attitudes can be measured using different types of scales (see Haley and Case, 1979). Items included in brand attitude scales can vary greatly, although the most frequent ones are related to the degree of likability, appeal and attractiveness of the brand (see Bruner *et al.*, 2005). Moreover, it is important to note that image, associations and attitude responses are influenced by consumers' past usership, meaning that bigger brands (those with more users) typically get more perception responses than smaller brands (those with less users) (Romaniuk and Sharp, 2000). This tendency seems to be based on the double-jeopardy principle, which states that smaller brands are characterized, among others, by fewer buyers and lower average purchase frequencies (Ehrenberg *et al.*, 2004).

## 3. Hypotheses development



Considering the different nature and functioning of brand love and brand attitude, highlighted in the previous section (see also Lastovicka and Sirianni, 2011), the present paper hypothesizes different relationships between brand love and brand attitude with actual brand performance.

As shown above, contributions on brand love stress the passion and deep affection that consumers feel toward their loved brands, as well as the strong connection and integration between consumers' selves and their loved brands (Albert *et al.*, 2009; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Rossiter, 2012). This profound consumer-brand relationship is shown to have a positive impact on intentional brand loyalty, among other variables (e.g., Batra *et al.*, 2012; Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen, 2010; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). On the contrary, brand attitude does not assume the existence of a strong, meaningful relationship between consumers and their loved brands. For these reasons, the current paper hypothesizes that:

**H1:** Brand love, compared to brand attitude, has a stronger positive relationship with brand performance measures related to behavioural brand loyalty.

As discussed above, brand attitudes consist instead of brand-related evaluations and judgments which foster the image, knowledge and associations that consumers have about brands (Keller, 1993; 2003). Moreover, brands which benefit from higher image, knowledge and associations are typically the bigger brands in the market (Romaniuk and Sharp, 2000). In contrast, brand love seems to be less related to the number of brand users. Consumers usually have a portfolio of brands to choose from: they do not only buy brands that they love, but several others with which they have different relationships (Fournier, 1998). Moreover, brand communities, which can be viewed as an expression of consumers' love toward a brand, can exist for both well-known (e.g., Muniz and Shao, 2005) and niche brands (e.g., O'Sullivan *et al.*, 2011). For these reasons, the paper hypothesizes that:

**H2:** Brand attitude, compared to brand love, has a stronger positive relationship with brand performance measures related to brand size.

#### 4. Overview of the research

To test the two hypotheses reported above, related to the different relationships of brand love and brand attitude with actual brand performance, the present paper first develops and validates a short but comprehensive measure of brand love in a cross-national (i.e., US, Russia and Indonesia) and cross-category context. The development of a brand love measure constitutes a necessary step in the present research. The literature, in fact, presents either one-item/one-dimension scales (e.g., Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Rossiter, 2012), which offers a partial view of the phenomenon of brand love because of their conciseness, or complex scales with a large set of items (Batra *et al.*, 2012) that may be difficult to apply in research contexts where other constructs are investigated. Although we fully acknowledge the value of these scales, we believe that there is need for a brand love scale that takes into consideration the multi-facet nature of brand love (Albert *et al.*, 2009; Batra *et al.*, 2012), but that at the same time it represents a flexible and versatile instrument that researchers can effectively apply.

Once the brand love scale is developed and validated, the paper uses a brand attitude measure derived from company's tracking studies and brand performance measures derived from panel data regarding the brand's market penetration, share of requirements and volume shares. These measures are among the key marketing metrics used by every manager (Farris *et al.*, 2009). In doing so, the paper compares the relationships of brand love and brand attitude with various actual brand performance measures.

All data are related to brands from different FMCG product categories. Although FMCG product categories are by definition low-involvement (Lambin *et al.*, 2007), the set of brands considered in this research includes both rational/functional and emotional/experiential brands: whereas the former type of brands focuses on the features and benefits of products, the latter type

emphasizes aspects such as the sensations and feelings associated with the brand (Brakus *et al.*, 2009).

5. Methodology

5.1. Brand love scale development

To develop a short but comprehensive brand love scale that could be effectively employed by researchers, the current paper conducts an empirical study in the US. Data were collected in the first months of 2014. The US market is chosen as it represents one of the core existing markets for the FMCG industry. The brand love measure is developed in accordance with standard scale development procedures (e.g., Churchill, 1979; DeVellis, 2011; Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994).

First, a set of thirty-five items reflecting the various facets of brand love is generated based on the literature (e.g., Albert *et al.*, 2009; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Fournier, 1998; Fournier *et al.*, 2012; Shimp and Madden, 1988). Two experts, of whom one is a senior academic and the other one is a senior manager, are asked to judge the items for their face validity (Hardesty and Bearden, 2004). The feedback provided is used to finalize the items and their wording. The set of thirty-five items is then administered by a leading research institute to a sample of 500 US consumers aged 18-65 and representative of the national population in terms of age, gender and geographic region. All respondents are consumers of the FMCG product category investigated and responsible of their purchases.

In the survey, respondents are asked about three brands randomly selected among those they are aware of in the chosen product category. Then, for each of these three brands, they are asked questions on their level of brand familiarity and overall feeling toward the brand. For brand familiarity, responses are recorded using a five-point scale where 1 = “Heard of but never bought”, 2 = “Have used it but not anymore”, “3 = Buy occasionally”, 4 = “Buy regularly alongside other brands” and 5 = “It is my first choice”. For overall feeling toward the brand, responses are recorded using a ten-point scale ranging from 1 = “I hate it” to 10 = “I love it”. Finally, respondents are

asked to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with each of the thirty-five brand love items using a seven-point scale, where 1 = “Extremely disagree” and 7 = “Extremely agree”.

Filter/attention questions are included throughout the survey.

The dataset is organized on the brand level, with a total of 1498 observations. Observations where filter/attention questions were not correctly answered are removed, leaving the dataset with 1330 observations ready for the analysis.

### 5.2. Brand love scale cross-national invariance

Having developed the brand love scale in the US, the next part of the research consists in the validation of the scale in a cross-national context. Two more countries are chosen to that aim, that is, Russia and Indonesia, which represent two core emerging developing economies based on the Emerging Market Index (MasterCard Worldwide, 2008). These two markets are also of key strategic importance for the FMCG industry as a whole.

In accordance with recent contributions in international marketing and branding literatures (e.g., Erdem *et al.*, 2006; Martinez *et al.*, 2008; Veloutsou *et al.*, 2005), the present paper establishes the cross-national invariance of the brand love scale both on qualitative and quantitative levels. Literature review and focus groups in Russia and Indonesia are used to support the qualitative equivalence of the brand love scale in the three countries examined. To establish quantitative cross-national invariance, the brand love scale is administered to samples of, respectively, 1002 consumers in Russia and 1014 consumers in Indonesia aged 18-65 years. In both cases, samples are representative of the national populations in terms of age, gender and geographic region; all respondents are consumers of the FMCG product category investigated and responsible of their purchases. Both data collections take place in mid-2014. The brand love scale developed in the US is translated in Russian and Indonesian language by professional translators through a back-translation process. In the survey, respondents are asked to think about a specific product category given by the researcher and to evaluate a brand in that category toward which they are most loyal.

They are then asked to rate that brand using the brand love scale. Responses are coded on a seven-point scale from 1 = “Extremely disagree” to 7 = “Extremely agree”.

Data collected are organized on the brand level and are merged with those collected in the US. In order to have comparable datasets, for the US, only observations related to brands to which consumers were loyal are considered (answers of 4 = “Buy regularly alongside other brands” and 5 = “It is my first choice” to the question on brand familiarity).

5.3. Relationship of brand love and brand attitude with actual brand performance

To examine the different relationships of brand love and brand attitude with brand performance measures, the brand love data collected in the US, Russia and Indonesia are merged with data on brand attitudes and behavioural measures related to the same set of brands previously investigated. These data are taken from existing sources (company- or industry-related).

More specifically, brand attitude data are derived from the 2014 company’s tracking studies working with us on the project. These tracking studies are conducted on brand users and are carried out by a leading international research institute in the area of brand and consumer marketing. The measure used by the company comprises various items and presents a high degree of similarity with brand attitude scales used in the academic literature (see Bruner *et al.*, 2005; Zarantonello and Pauwels-Delassus, 2015). To be sure, a pretest is conducted to provide evidence of the similarity between brand attitude scales from the literature and the measure used by the company. A chi-square test is also used to ensure the comparability of brand attitude data, which refer to brand users, and brand love data, which refer to brand loyal consumers.

With respect to brand performance measures, these are derived from panel data (ACNielsen and Europanel) in each of the three countries chosen. The brand performance measures considered in the current paper include:

- Brand’s market penetration measures, which are computed as the number of customers who have purchased the brand over the total population in the last year (variable labelled

“penetration”) and as an incremental measure over the last two years (“penetration growth”).

- Brand’s volume share measures, which are calculated as the brand unit sales over the total category unit sales in the last year (“volume share”) and as an incremental measure over of the last two years (“volume share growth”).
- Brand’s share of requirements, or share of wallet, measures, which are computed as the number of brand purchases over the total category purchases by brand buyers, in the last year (“share of requirements”) and as an incremental measure over the last two years (“share of requirements growth”).

Penetration, share of requirements and volume share are static measures, as they describe the brand’s *status quo* (e.g., current size of the market), while penetration growth, share of requirements growth and volume share growth are dynamic measures, as they are reflective of the brand’s evolution (e.g., growth of the market). Whereas penetration and volume share measures are descriptive of the brand size, share of requirements measures are indicative of the loyalty toward the brand (see Farris *et al.*, 2009). Static measures refer to the year 2014 whereas growth measures refer to the years 2012-2014<sup>3</sup>.

Data are merged and organized on the brand level. To illustrate, every observation in the aggregated dataset refers to one brand and contains composite measures of brand love (computed as a mean of all values reported by consumers evaluating that specific brand) and brand attitude, as well as the various brand performance measures. In total, the aggregated dataset includes fifty observations (brands), that is, twenty-two observations (brands) for the US, fifteen observations (brands) for Russia and twelve observations (brands) for Indonesia.

## 6. Results and discussion

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<sup>3</sup> Growth measures are computed as the difference between the value in the end year (2014) and the value in the start year (2012) expressed as percentage of the start year.

6.1. Brand love scale development

The US dataset is randomly divided into three different sub-datasets, one for each of the following scale development phases, in order to develop and validate the brand love measurement scale consistently with the literature (e.g., Churchill, 1979).

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA). A series of EFAs using maximum likelihood and promax rotation is conducted on the first sub-dataset, composed of 444 cases. The analysis uncovers two major factors underlying our brand love scale items. The first factor is mostly related to the cognitive and emotional connection between the consumer and the brand, and is called “consumer-brand connection”. On the other hand, the second factor is mostly related to the sensorial and cognitive gratification derived from consuming the product; for these reasons, the second factor is called “consumer gratification”. Items with a factor loading  $< 0.70$  or a cross-loading  $> 0.25$  are dropped (Hair *et al.*, 2005), leaving twenty-eight items (total variance explained = 80.49%) for the next part of the analysis.

To further reduce the items, and to identify the facets within each factor, the two factors are factor-analysed individually. The analysis reveals three facets for the first factor (total variance explained = 85.84%); the three facets are labelled, respectively, “fantasies and thoughts”, “attachment” and “self-expression”. The analysis also reveals two facets for the second factor (total variance explained = 79.47%); these facets are labelled, “pleasure” and “idealization”. To retain items within each facet, loadings, cross-loadings and factor score correlation matrix are inspected. Nine items (three for each facet) are retained for the first factor and four items (two for each facet) are retained for the second factor. In both cases, factors account for more than 70% of total variance and each of them explains at least 5% of total variance, indicating strong factors (Hair *et al.*, 2005; Netemeyer *et al.*, 2003). All factors show an adequate level of reliability, with Cronbach’s alpha above 0.90 for each factor ( $\alpha_{\text{fantasies\&thoughts}} = 0.958$ ;  $\alpha_{\text{attachment}} = 0.952$ ;  $\alpha_{\text{self-expression}} = 0.945$ ;  $\alpha_{\text{pleasure}} = 0.909$ ;  $\alpha_{\text{idealization}} = 0.925$ ). The final scale is reported in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

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Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) is run using structural equation modelling (Lisrel; Jöreskog and Sörbom, 1996) on the second sub-dataset, composed of 443 cases, to assess the convergent and discriminant validity of the measures. The fit of the model, built taking into consideration the five brand love dimensions (i.e., fantasies and thoughts, attachment, self-expression, pleasure, and idealization), is good ( $\chi^2$  (df) = 154.26 (55); CFI = 0.99; NNFI = 0.99; RMSEA = 0.05; SRMR = 0.02) and all the average variances extracted are above the recommended threshold of 0.50 (in each case are above 0.83). The correlations between the factors are in some cases quite high (as between the first three dimensions, that is, fantasies and thoughts, attachment and self-expression, and the last two dimensions, that is, pleasure and idealization), but the specific analyses of the level of correlation do not include the value 1 by use of confidence intervals in all cases.

Structural model. In order to examine in depth these results taking into due consideration the correlations identified in the CFA between the first three factors and the last two, respectively, the next part of the analysis tests a formative model in which all the defining indicators are included (Cadogan and Lee, 2013), considering the first three factors as indicators of a specific dimension named consumer-brand connection, and the other two as indicators of a second dimension named consumer gratification. This step of the analysis is based on the third sub-dataset, composed of 443 cases. The fit of this model in which the value mean of the dimensions fantasies and thoughts, attachment, self-expression, pleasure, and idealization are the indicators of the two new dimensions (i.e., consumer-brand connection and consumer gratification), is satisfactory ( $\chi^2$  (df) = 38.89 (4); CFI = 0.98; NNFI = 0.95; RMSEA = 0.08; SRMR = 0.02) and the factor loading of each item on its corresponding dimension are high (see Table 2). The correlation between the two factors is high (0.79;  $p < 0.001$ ), and a likelihood test that compares the model where the two variables were freely correlated with the model where the correlation between the two was fixed to 1.00 gives a  $\Delta\chi^2$  ( $\Delta$ df)



= 270.02 (1);  $p < 0.01$ , confirming that consumer-brand connection and consumer gratification are distinct.

Insert Table 2 about here

Following similar studies in the literature (e.g., Batra *et al.*, 2012; Yoo and Donthu, 2001), a concurrent validity test is also run in order to test the performance of the developed brand love scale compared to the overall feeling toward the brand measured in the questionnaire. Because the brand love scale is measured on a seven-point scale and the overall feeling toward the brand is measured on a ten-point scale, these two variables are first standardized. The analysis shows a high and statistically significant correlation between brand love and overall feeling toward the brand (0.68,  $p < 0.001$ ), which means that concurrent validity is achieved.

Given these results, it is appropriate to tests the brand love scale cross-national invariance adopting the proposed structural model.

6.2. Brand love scale cross-national invariance

The present paper establishes the invariance of the brand love scale on both qualitative and quantitative levels. Qualitatively, it shows how the scale possesses conceptual equivalence, functional equivalence, translation equivalence, measure equivalence, sample equivalence and data collection equivalence (Usunier, 2000). See Table 3 for details<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> As further invariance control, a specific test is run to check for any “differences in response styles” problems in the different countries (Baumgartner and Steenkamp, 2001). A sample of 151 respondents from the three countries ( $N_{US} = 46$ ,  $N_{Russia} = 45$ ,  $N_{Indonesia} = 60$ ) is collected. We control the following response styles (Harzing, 2006) on the five formative variables of the model (i.e., fantasies and thoughts, attachment, self-expression, pleasure, idealization): acquiescence ( $US = 0.27$ ;  $Russia = 0.25$ ;  $Indonesia = 0.22$ ;  $F(2,148) = 0.30$ ;  $p = 0.74$ ), disacquiescence ( $US = 0.10$ ;  $Russia = 0.11$ ;  $Indonesia = 0.03$ ;  $F(2,148) = 3.06$ ;  $p = 0.051$ ) and acquiescence balance ( $US = 0.17$ ;  $Russia = 0.14$ ;

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Insert Table 3 about here

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In line with these results, quantitative analyses confirm the invariance of the scale across countries. The analyses compare data from US, Russia and Indonesia, running a series of tests imposing progressive levels of invariance (Steenkamp and Baumgartner, 1998; Vandenberg and Lance, 2000). In detail, the analysis tests for configural, metric, scalar, and factor covariance invariance, assessing them across the three countries.

Configural invariance. The chi-square associated with this model, which assumes that the items of the measurement instrument show the same configuration across the countries (Horn and McArdle, 1992), is significant ( $\chi^2$  (df) = 47.38 (12);  $p = 0.00$ ), but the relative chi-square ( $47.38/12 = 3.94$ ) is acceptable (Jackson *et al.*, 1993). Although RMSEA (0.09) is higher than the recommended value of 0.08, the CFI (0.99), IFI (0.99) and NNFI (0.97) are within very high levels (Bentler, 1990; Browne and Cudeck, 1993). These results indicate that the items used to measure brand love, under the configural invariance constraints across the three countries, describe adequately the data, especially considering SRMR index that is below 0.04 in each group.

Metric invariance. The chi-square associated to the full metric invariance model (i.e., the matrix of factor loadings is constraint to be invariant across the three countries) is significant ( $\chi^2$  (df) = 52.12 (18);  $p = 0.00$ ) but the relative chi-square ( $52.12/18 = 2.90$ ) is below 3, as recommended by Carmines and McIver (1981). Results indicate that this model describes the data well (CFI = 0.99,

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Indonesia = 0.19;  $F(2,148) = 0.16$ ;  $p = 0.86$ ) to detect the tendency to agree or disagree with an item regardless of the content; extreme positive response styles (US = 0.05; Russia = 0.08; Indonesia = 0.19;  $F(2,148) = 3.95$ ;  $p = 0.02$ ), extreme negative response styles (US = 0.03; Russia = 0.04; Indonesia = 0.01;  $F(2,148) = 1.23$ ;  $p = 0.30$ ), and middle response styles (US = 0.11; Russia = 0.08; Indonesia = 0.08;  $F(2,148) = 0.69$ ;  $p = 0.50$ ) to detect the tendency to use the extreme or middle response categories on ratings scales. Results display that the three countries show fairly similar response patterns.

IFI = 0.99, NNFI = 0.98, RMSEA = 0.08) (Bentler, 1990; Browne and Cudeck, 1993). Moreover, the SRMR index is below 0.03 in each group. The chi-square test comparing the configural invariance and the metric invariance models is non-significant ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 4.74$ ;  $\Delta df = 6$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ), verifying the superiority of the model with more constraints.

Scalar invariance. The chi-square associated to this model, in which the cross-national differences in the means of the observed items are presumed to derive from differences in the means of the underlying constructs, is significant ( $\chi^2$  (df) = 52.37 (28);  $p = 0.004$ ) but the relative chi-square ( $52.37/28 = 1.87$ ) is below 2, representing a good fit of the model (Byrne, 1991; Carmines and McIver, 1981). Results indicate that the full scalar invariance model describes the data well (CFI = 0.99, IFI = 0.99, NNFI = 0.99, RMSEA = 0.06) (Bentler, 1990; Browne and Cudeck, 1993). Moreover, the SRMR index is below 0.03 in each group. The chi-square test comparing the full metric invariance and the full scalar invariance models is non-significant ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 0.25$ ;  $\Delta df = 10$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ), verifying the superiority of the second model.

Factor covariance invariance. The full factor covariance invariance model does not reach acceptable fit indexes, thus a partial invariance model is run (constraining the factor covariance to be invariant between two of the three groups). The chi-square is significant ( $\chi^2$  (df) = 53.48 (29);  $p = 0.004$ ) but the relative chi-square ( $53.48/29 = 1.84$ ) is below 2, showing a good fit of the model (Byrne, 1991; Carmines and McIver, 1981). Results point out that the items, under the partial factor covariance invariance constraints across the three countries, describe the data well (CFI = 0.99, IFI = 0.99, NNFI = 0.99, RMSEA = 0.05) (Bentler, 1990; Browne and Cudeck, 1993). The chi-square test comparing the full scalar invariance model and the partial factor covariance invariance model is significant ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 1.11$ ;  $\Delta df = 1$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ), verifying the superiority of the model with more constraints. Thus, this model shows that the correlations between the latent constructs are invariant across two of the three countries (i.e., US and Russia), indicating that this element is worth to be examined in each country.

Taken together, these results indicate that the brand love measures, under the above series of invariance constraints across the three countries, describe the data well, ensuring the adequate applicability of the model for cross-national analyses. Table 4 shows the results for each of the three samples. Given these results, it makes sense to proceed with the analyses using a composite measure of brand love (min = 1.74; max = 7.00; M = 5.50; SD = 1.21).

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Insert Table 4 about here

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### 6.3. Relationship of brand love and brand attitude with brand performance

Preliminary analysis. A pretest checks the correlation between the measure used by the company and brand attitude scales derived from the literature. A sample of 35 respondents (female = 65%, mean age = 25 years) evaluates five brands from the same product categories previously investigated using Spears and Singh's (2004) five-item brand attitude scale, a three-item brand attitude measure taken from Bruner *et al.* (2005) and a multi-item brand attitude measure derived from brand tracking studies, that is comparable to the brand attitude measures typically found in the literature<sup>5</sup>.

The analysis shows that the correlation between the company's measure and Spears and Singh's (2004) brand attitude scale is equal to 0.992 ( $p < 0.01$ ) and the correlation between the company's measure and Bruner *et al.*'s (2005) scale is equal to 0.989 ( $p < 0.01$ ). Because of this high, positive and significant correlation between the company-derived measure and both brand attitude scales taken from the literature, the paper proceeds using the company-derived measure as a valid measure of brand attitude.

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<sup>5</sup> Items of the brand attitude measure are proprietary of the company supporting the project and cannot be disclosed, similarly to McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig (2002). The authors are available to provide more information on the procedure used to establish a correlation between company- and literature-derived brand attitude measures.

A chi-square test is then conducted to compare the two independent variables (i.e., brand love and brand attitude) in order to establish the comparability of data. Results show there is no difference in their distribution ( $\chi^2$  (df) = 832.00 (783);  $p = 0.11$ ), ensuring that their relationships with the dependent variables are not due to “a priori” differences.

Regression analysis. A series of regression analyses is conducted in order to check the different relationships of brand love and brand attitude with brand performance measures. The analysis uses the composite measures of brand love and brand attitude as independent variables, and the various brand performance measures (i.e., “penetration”, “penetration growth”, “share of requirements”, “share of requirements growth”, “volume share” and “volume share growth”) as dependent variables. Due to the nature of the dataset used, the interpretation of data analysis is guided by  $p < 0.10$  as criterion for significance of results. The analysis shows that:

- Brand love has a statistically significant and negative relationship with penetration (std.  $b = -0.385$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).
- Brand love has a statistically significant and positive relationship with share of requirements growth (std.  $b = 0.406$ ,  $p < 0.10$ ).
- Brand attitude has a statistically significant and positive relationship with volume share (std.  $b = 0.584$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

Insert Table 5 about here

Detailed results are presented in Table 5. These results partially support the two hypotheses. Specifically, H1, which stated that brand love, compared to brand attitude, has a stronger positive relationship with brand performance measures related to loyalty, is partially confirmed. The analysis, in fact, showed a positive and significant relationship between brand love and share of requirements growth, but not with share of requirements. This finding may be better understood by taking into account the nature of these two brand performance measures. As illustrated previously,

share of requirements is a static measure which is descriptive of the brand's *status quo*, whereas share of requirements growth is a dynamic measure which is descriptive of the brand's evolution. The finding, therefore, seems to suggest that brand love is related to growth in behavioural brand loyalty rather than current loyalty.

With respect to H2, this hypothesis posited that brand attitude, compared to brand love, has a stronger positive relationship with measures related to brand size. The analysis, however, showed a positive relationship with only one of the measures used in the analyses, that is, volume share. The lack of significant relationships with penetration measures (i.e., penetration and penetration growth) could be explained in the light of the fact that both attitude and volume share measures include a reference to the competitive context, whereas penetration measures view the brand in absolute terms, as illustrated previously. Moreover, the lack of a significant relationship with volume share growth, and instead the presence of a significant relationship with volume share, seems to suggest that brand attitude is predictive of the brand's current status rather than its growth. H2 is therefore only partially supported.

A further, unexpected result also emerged from the analysis. It was found that brand love is negatively related to the penetration of the brand in the market, that is, a brand performance measure which is indicative of the brand size in the current situation. This negative relationship between brand love and brand size seems to suggest that brand love diminishes for bigger brands and, in contrast, increases for smaller brands. This phenomenon may be related to the life stage of the brand: as the brand becomes bigger, it needs to offer more mainstream benefits that can appeal multiple audiences rather than a specific niche of consumers, trading off special connections for reach. This effect could be viewed as a sort of "brand love dilution". Although unexpected, it is in line with the point of view adopted in this research and supports the proposed hypotheses.

## 7. Conclusion

The objective of this paper was to explore the relationship between brand love and actual brand performance, as well as to make a comparison with the relationship between brand attitude and actual brand performance. To do so, it combined psychological with behavioural data and adopted a newly developed brand love scale. Although it suffers from some limitations, which are discussed next, this paper has important implications for both marketing and branding theory and practice.

From a conceptual point of view, the paper contributes to further distinguish brand love from brand attitude, by showing the different relationships that these two constructs have with key brand performance measures. Brand love, in particular, emerged as a measure of the potential of the brand, particularly related to growth in behavioural brand loyalty. This result supports and expands the work of scholars who previously found evidence of the relationship between brand love and intentional brand loyalty (e.g., Batra *et al.*, 2012; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). In contrast, brand attitude emerged as a measure that is descriptive of the brand's *status quo*, in particular with reference to brand size.

By developing a new brand love scale using representative samples of consumers from three countries, the paper also further supports the complex nature of brand love emphasized by some scholars (e.g., Albert *et al.*, 2009; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006); a complex nature that can be captured through a continuous variable that ranges from non-existent to very intense. The current paper supports therefore the utility of this “continuous variable” perspective by showing that brand love is meaningfully related to actual brand performance across a variety of FMCG brands and consumers, even though most of them were not deeply in love with the brand in question.

From a company's perspective, these findings contributes to further clarify the different roles that brand love and brand attitude may have in the company's brand measurement system (Keller, 1998), and support the usefulness of having both these measures for different purposes. In particular, brand love measures may be used to predict brand-related trends in the medium/long term and to evaluate the potential of the brand in a way that is not affected by its size. In other

words, the brand love measure may be used to carry out a fair assessment of smaller and bigger brands. For example, when multinational companies acquire small brands, they may use brand love measures to assess the potential of development for such brands: a high brand love, driving growth in behavioural loyalty, can balance the push for dilution that comes from the need to expand the brand. On the contrary, brand attitude measures may be used by companies to better understand the *status quo* of a brand, although this assessment would be influenced by the size of the brand in the present situation.

With respect to its limitations, the current paper combined measures of brand love with other existing measures of brand attitude and brand performance. Although behavioural measures are of great value for the research, as they describe actual (versus claimed) consumer behaviours, the aggregated dataset refers to different samples of consumers as the set of measures used originates from different sources. While consumer samples that were representative of the corresponding national populations were employed, future research could collect both psychological and behavioural data from the same sample of consumers, in order to ensure a higher degree of comparability of data. Besides, the brand love data used in the paper were collected by asking respondents to select a brand toward which they are most loyal. In contrast, the brand attitude data were collected from samples of consumer who were using the brand. Although the comparability of these two different variables was established through proper testing, further research may consider brands to which the respondent is loyal as well as brands toward which does not feel to be loyal, to confirm and strengthen results.



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Table 1 – Brand love scale

Scale dimension	Scale item
Fantasies and thoughts	• I frequently find myself thinking about this brand
	• I often fantasize about this brand
	• My daydreams often include this brand
Attachment	• I feel bonded to this brand
	• I feel a lot of affection for this brand
	• I feel attached to this brand
Self-expression	• It says something about who I am
	• It helps express myself
	• This brand says something meaningful
Pleasure	• This brand gives me great pleasure
	• This brand makes me feel good
Idealization	• This brand represents my ideal...
	• This brand is close to perfection

Note: ... indicates a specific product category

**Table 2. Results of the structural model**

<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>Indicators</i>	<i>Std. factor loading</i>	<i>t-value</i>
Consumer-brand connection	Fantasies and thoughts	0.92	25.37***
	Attachment	0.96	27.05***
	Self-expression	0.95	26.69***
Consumer gratification	Pleasure	0.91	24.26***
	Idealization	0.96	26.31***
<i>Correlation between factors (std. error)</i>			
	Consumer-brand connection	Consumer gratification	
Consumer-brand connection	1.00		
Consumer gratification	0.79*** (0.02)	1.00	

\* If  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* if  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* if  $p < 0.001$ ;



Table 3 – Qualitative equivalence of the brand love scale

Conceptual equivalence	The concept of “brand love” has a similar meaning in the three different countries. The focus groups reveal that both Russian and Indonesian consumers refer to aspects of consumer gratification and consumer-brand connection when describing their love for certain brands. Moreover, the literature has shown that the concept of brand love, or brand romance, can be used to study extreme positive emotions of consumers from emerging markets (e.g., Sarkar and Sreejesh, 2014; Sarkar, 2014).
Functional equivalence	The concept of brand love is used similarly in the three countries. In all the countries, consumers use the word “love” in the context of branding to refer to brands and brands’ products they are passionate about. This is also supported by the literature (e.g., Sarkar and Sreejesh, 2014; Sarkar, 2014).
Translation equivalence	The brand love scale is translated into Russian and Indonesian language by professional translators through a back-translation process. This ensures a correct translation of the scale, as well as the meaningfulness of the brand love scale items in Russian and Indonesian language.
Measure equivalence	The brand love scale is utilized in the same way in the three countries. Responses to the brand love scale are recorded on seven-point Likert scales which describe as “1” the lowest point of agreement and as “7” the highest one. Moreover, the distance between the seven points on the scale is interpreted in the same way by consumers from the three countries.
Sample equivalence	The samples in each country are equivalent. They all include consumers who are responsible for their purchases with respect to the FMCG product category investigated. They are adult consumers with an age comprised between 18 and 65 years.
Data collection equivalence	The data are collected in the same way in the three countries. Respondents are administered the survey by a professional research institute through the CAWI (computer-assisted web interviewing) method.

**Table 4. The invariance model across the three countries: Results**

	US	Russia	Indonesia
Std. factor loading (t-value)			
<i>Consumer-brand connection</i>			
Fantasies and thoughts	0.86 (--)	0.86 (--)	0.86 (--)
Attachment	0.83 (35.80***)	0.83 (35.80***)	0.83 (35.80***)
Self-expression	0.87 (37.93***)	0.87 (37.93***)	0.87 (37.93***)
<i>Consumer gratification</i>			
Pleasure	0.81 (--)	0.81 (--)	0.81 (--)
Idealization	0.79 (23.98***)	0.79 (23.98***)	0.79 (23.98***)
Correlation between factors			
	<i>Consumer gratification</i>	<i>Consumer gratification</i>	<i>Consumer gratification</i>
<i>Consumer-brand connection</i>	0.96 (11.90***)	0.96 (11.90***)	0.62 (10.52***)
Fit index	chi <sup>2</sup> (29) = 53.48; CFI = 0.99; IFI = 0.99; NNFI = 0.99; RMSEA = 0.05		
	SRMR = 0.04	SRMR = 0.04	SRMR = 0.02
	GFI = 0.97	GFI = 0.95	GFI = 0.99

\* If  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* if  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* if  $p < 0.001$ .

Table 5. Relationships between brand love and brand attitude with brand performance measures

DV: penetration			
IVs	Unstd. b	Std. b	P-value
Brand love	-9.526	-0.385	0.034
Brand attitude	0.131	0.182	0.302
R = 0.397, R <sup>2</sup> = 0.158			
DV: penetration growth			
IVs	Unstd. B	Std. b	P-value
Brand love	-0.122	-0.224	0.233
Brand attitude	0.004	0.222	0.237
R = 0.287, R <sup>2</sup> = 0.082			
DV: share of requirements			
IVs	Unstd. b	Std. b	P-value
Brand love	-4.925	-0.124	0.556
Brand attitude	0.191	0.280	0.192
R = 0.310, R <sup>2</sup> = 0.096			
DV: share of requirements growth			
IVs	Unstd. b	Std. b	P-value
Brand love	0.279	0.406	0.058
Brand attitude	0.002	0.155	0.449
R = 0.433, R <sup>2</sup> = 0.188			
DV: volume share			
IVs	Unstd. b	Std. b	P-value
Brand love	0.148	0.016	0.923
Brand attitude	0.160	0.584	0.002
R = 0.587, R <sup>2</sup> = 0.344			
DV: volume share growth			
IVs	Unstd. b	Std. b	P-value
Brand love	-7.519	-0.197	0.331
Brand attitude	0.102	0.090	0.654
R = 0.202, R <sup>2</sup> = 0.041			

Note: Significant relationships are in bold (p < 0.10).